

May Prompt - Kaleidoscope Book Club

Theme: **Service & Sacrifice: Military + LGBTQIA+**

In theme with Memorial Day, this month we will read books featuring LGBTQIA+ veterans, active-duty characters, or stories set in military contexts. Explore the complex experiences of LGBTQIA+ people serving, having served, or living in the shadows of war and conflict. Books should center LGBTQIA+ characters or be written by authors from the community. Fiction, nonfiction, or memoir are welcome. Books from any category—adult, young adult, juvenile—are welcome.

FICTION

Historical Fiction

As Meat Loves Salt by Maria McCann

Fleeing a brutal past, Jacob Cullen reinvents himself amid the chaos of civil war, where loyalty and survival are never guaranteed. As he is swept into the violence and shifting allegiances of 17th-century England, his passions and desires threaten to undo him. *[Historical fiction; gay main character in 17th-century military conflict]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

Cantoras by Carolina De Robertis

In a time of repression and fear, five women carve out a secret haven by the sea, where they can live and love freely. Across decades of political upheaval, their bond becomes both sanctuary and resistance. *[Historical fiction; lesbian main characters living under military dictatorship]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

The Charioteer by Mary Renault

Recovering from injury in a wartime hospital, a young soldier finds himself caught between duty, desire, and the expectations of those around him. As he forms deep connections with two very different men, he must confront what it means to live truthfully. *[Historical WWII fiction; gay main character]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

Giovanni's Room by James Baldwin

In the shadowed streets of Paris, a man reflects on love, guilt, and the choices that shaped his life. Haunted by his past—including his time as a soldier—he is drawn into a relationship that

forces him to confront his deepest truths. *[Historical fiction; gay main character who is a veteran]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

The Huntress by Kate Quinn

From the wreckage of war emerges a relentless pursuit of justice, as unlikely allies join forces to track a notorious Nazi fugitive. Spanning continents and perspectives, this gripping tale explores vengeance, courage, and hidden identities. *[Historical WWII fiction; includes lesbian main character]* Link to physical copy [here](#). Link to hoopla audiobook [here](#).

In Memoriam by Alice Winn

Two schoolboys form a tender, unspoken bond that is tested when they are thrust into the brutal realities of the First World War. Amid the mud and horror of the trenches, love becomes both a refuge and a risk. *[Historical WWI fiction; gay main characters serving in war]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

The Night Watch by Sarah Waters

Moving backward through time, this novel reveals the intertwined lives of four Londoners shaped by war and secrecy. As past wounds surface, hidden relationships and sacrifices come into sharp focus. *[Historical WWII fiction; lesbian and gay characters]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous by Ocean Vuong

Written as a letter never meant to be read, this story traces a young man's life shaped by memory, migration, and inherited trauma. The lingering echoes of war ripple through generations, shaping identity and love. *[Historical/contemporary fiction; gay narrator, grandfather's war trauma central]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

The Persian Boy by Mary Renault

Through the eyes of a devoted companion, the life and conquests of a legendary ruler unfold in vivid detail. Love and power intertwine on the battlefield as empires rise and fall. *[Historical fiction; gay main character in ancient military setting]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

Regeneration by Pat Barker

At a military hospital, soldiers haunted by the horrors of war struggle to reclaim their sense of self. Through their stories, the psychological toll of conflict—and the bonds formed in its wake—are laid bare. *[Historical WWI fiction; gay characters among soldiers with PTSD]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller (Kit loved this! 🌟)

This sweeping retelling of myth brings to life a profound love set against the backdrop of legendary war. As destiny draws them toward the battlefield, two companions must face glory,

loss, and fate. *[Historical/mythological fiction; gay main characters in ancient warfare]* Link to physical copy [here](#). Link to hoopla audiobook [here](#).

Contemporary Fiction

Semper Fi by Keira Andrews

Bound by duty and secrecy, two Marines form a connection that grows deeper with every shared hardship. In a world where honesty comes at a cost, their relationship is both a refuge and a risk. *[Contemporary military romance; gay main characters]* Link to hoopla audiobook [here](#).

Science Fiction & Fantasy

Ancillary Justice by Ann Leckie

Once a vast artificial intelligence controlling a warship, Breq now inhabits a single human body with a singular mission: revenge. In a universe shaped by empire and conquest, identity itself becomes a battlefield. *[Military science fiction; gender-fluid protagonist]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

Iron Widow by Xiran Jay Zhao (Kit loved this! 🌟)

In a world where young pilots are sacrificed in war machines, one girl refuses to accept her fate. With power, rage, and ambition, she sets out to rewrite the rules of both war and society. *[Science fiction; bisexual female main character in mecha warfare]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

The Jasmine Throne by Tasha Suri

A captive princess and a servant bound by dangerous magic find their fates intertwined amid political unrest. As rebellion brews, their growing connection could change the course of an empire. *[Fantasy with military conflict; sapphic main characters]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

Ocean's Echo by Everina Maxwell (Kit loved this! 🌟)

When a disciplined officer is paired with an unruly psychic, their uneasy alliance hides deeper truths. As conspiracy and danger close in, trust becomes their most powerful weapon. *[Science fiction military romance; gay main characters]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

She Who Became the Sun by Shelley Parker-Chan (Kit loved this! 🌟)

Refusing the fate assigned to her, a girl takes on a new identity and rises through the ranks in a time of rebellion. Driven by ambition and destiny, she challenges the very forces that seek to define her. *[Historical fantasy; genderqueer main character in military conquest]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

The Stars Are Legion by Kameron Hurley

Awakening with no memory in a decaying world, a woman must navigate shifting alliances and brutal conflict. Survival demands both strength and sacrifice in a society shaped by war. *[Science fiction; lesbian main characters in military conflict]* Link to hoopla audiobook [here](#).

The Unbroken by C.L. Clark

Torn between loyalty to empire and ties to her homeland, a soldier becomes entangled in a growing rebellion. As tensions rise, she must decide where she truly belongs. *[Military fantasy; sapphic main characters]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

Two Truths and a Lie by Cory O'Brien

Reality bends and fractures in this inventive tale of shifting identities and hidden truths. As the stakes escalate, nothing—and no one—can be taken at face value. *[Science fiction with LGBTQ+ themes]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

Winter's Orbit by Everina Maxwell (Kit loved this! ✨)

A political marriage meant to preserve peace becomes something far more complicated as two men uncover secrets that could ignite war. Amid intrigue and danger, an unexpected bond begins to form. *[Science fiction romance; gay main characters in military/diplomatic context]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

NONFICTION

The Deviant's War

A powerful exploration of early resistance against government persecution of LGBTQ+ people. It traces the origins of a movement that would reshape civil rights. *[History; LGBTQ+ rights activism related to military/government discrimination]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

The Lavender Bans (New! 2026 Release! ✨)

An examination of the policies that systematically excluded LGBTQ+ individuals from military service. It reveals how discrimination was codified and challenged over time. *[History; military discrimination policies]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

A Queer History of the United States

A sweeping look at LGBTQ+ history, including the often-overlooked role of military service and activism. It reframes the past through stories of resistance and community. *[History; broad LGBTQ+ history including military contexts]* Link to physical copy [here](#).

Interlibrary Loan Non-Fiction Recommendations for Further Reading

These titles are not available through EMPL's consortium sharing or hoopla, but may be available through Interlibrary loan.

Closets, Combat and Coming Out by Jed Ocot

A deeply personal account of navigating identity within the rigid structure of military life. Through challenge and resilience, one soldier's journey reveals the cost of silence and the power of truth. *[Memoir; LGBTQ+ veteran's experience]*

The Last Deployment by Bronson Lemer

Blending humor and heartbreak, this memoir chronicles a year of service in Iraq. It captures the complexity of being both a soldier and a young man coming to terms with himself. *[Memoir; gay soldier in Iraq War]*

My Queer War by James Lord

An intimate reflection on service, identity, and survival within the armed forces. Through personal experience, it sheds light on the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in uniform. *[Memoir; LGBTQ+ veteran]*

Out of Step by Anthony Moll

Marching to a different rhythm, this memoir explores the tension between duty and authenticity. It offers a candid look at what it means to serve while staying true to oneself. *[Memoir; LGBTQ+ military service]*

Serve in Silence by Margarethe Cammermeyer

A decorated officer's career is upended when she is forced to confront institutional discrimination. Her story is one of courage, loss, and the fight for dignity. *[Memoir; lesbian officer discharged for sexuality]*

Tell by Major Margaret Witt

At the center of a landmark legal battle, one woman challenges the system that sought to silence her. This is a story of love, defiance, and change at a pivotal moment in history. *[Memoir/legal narrative; lesbian Air Force officer's fight for reinstatement]*

Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II by Allan Berube

Drawing on firsthand accounts, this history reveals the hidden lives of LGBTQ+ service members during WWII. It uncovers stories long erased from the official record. *[History; gay and lesbian WWII veterans]*

Fighting Proud by Stephen Bourne

This account brings to light the overlooked contributions of gay soldiers in two world wars. Through research and narrative, it honors lives lived in secrecy and courage. *[History; gay soldiers in world wars]*

The Lavender Scare by David Johnson

A chilling look at a period when fear and prejudice led to widespread purges of LGBTQ+ individuals from government roles. Its impact reached deeply into military and civilian life alike. *[History; persecution of LGBTQ+ federal workers including military]*

Officially Gay by Gary Lehring

This analysis explores how institutions have shaped the understanding of sexuality through policy and power. It offers insight into the intersection of identity, governance, and military life. *[Political analysis; military and government sexuality policies]*

Our Time edited by Josh Seefried

Through a chorus of voices, this collection shares the lived experiences of those who served under restrictive policies. Together, their stories form a powerful testament to resilience and change. *[Anthology; LGBTQ+ military experiences under DADT]*

Out in Force edited by Gregory M. Herek, Jared B. Jobe, and Ralph M. Carney

Combining research and personal insight, this work examines the realities of LGBTQ+ service members. It provides a comprehensive look at policy, identity, and lived experience. *[Academic anthology; LGBTQ+ military service research]*

Queer (in)justice : the criminalization of LGBT people in the United States / Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock.

This book investigates how legal systems have targeted and criminalized LGBTQ+ individuals. It highlights the intersections of law, identity, and institutional power. *[Legal/social history; criminalization of LGBTQ+ people]*